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HE'S SMALL and angular and agile-looking, but Stevie Nicks has a big rock bluesy voice that'll give you instant afro-scalp. Early in '68 I saw him

with Traffic at the Scene. Their bass player had temporarily quit, making it a trio of drums (Jim Capaldi), saxophone-flute (Chris Wood), and Winwood on organ and guitar. Since sax and flute are essentially lead instruments, when Wood wasn't soloing the group was a twosome of drums and organ. You never noticed it. Winwood played a bass part with his left hand, lead with his right, and filled the room with his incredible voice. He did all four things better than most musicians do one (and one at a time).

Winwood first knocked out the pop world by writing, arranging, playing, and singing on "Gimme Some Lovin'" with the Spencer Davis Group when he was only 16. He's 20 now. Because he's one of those rare all-around musicians who can do everything, Winwood

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is quietly known as a rock genius. Still he seems to have spent the last five years just missing big success. He was the power and the glory of Traffic. Because of their three tasty albums, I was sorry that they broke up.

The death of Cream, on the other hand, had my tacit encouragement as the group boiled off into three frantic, lonely soloists. My respect for them as polished technicians dwindled under their apparent inability to make music—"make" in the same sense as "make love." Cream in its sterility rarely did anything after their first album that seemed more than a loveless exercise.

I didn't expect to like Blind Faith. Matchmaking Eric Clapton and Ginger Baker, the heavy idols of Cream, with the fair-haired boy from Traffic seemed like a perfect formula for dollars. And perhaps it is. But unexpectedly for me, it also means better music for all three. "Blind Faith" (Atlantic SD 33-304A and SD 33-304B) is a great first album.

Clapton and Baker, with the unobtrusive but effective bass of Rick Grech (from Family) put a sweeping bottom under Winwood that gives him the power he never had before. Winwood's musicality and vocals foliate that immense Clapton-Baker force and give it the direction it lacked in Cream. The presence of a fourth person here, the keyboard rhythm, and the songs' intrinsic strength allow Blind Faith to lay back and be a band. They all support each other, not being compelled to fill constantly.

Another asset is the production of Jimmy Miller, who produced all three Traffic albums and was co-author of some of their last songs. He gives consistency to Blind Faith's recording and an orchestral depth as opposed to the clipped "live" sound of Cream. There are some unique phasing effects that dilate Clapton's guitar with a pipe-organ tone.

Obviously these musicians turn each other on; Clapton and Baker play better than they have in a long time. Because the band has such power, Baker isn't required to be super human. He can play the role of an ordinary drummer and be more dynamic than if he were up front under constant scrutiny.

Clapton, because he has in Winwood a melodic partner versed in jazz and classical styles, is finally learning to shake the straight blues scale that was his most limiting factor. This influence also shows in his writing. "Presence of the Lord," a rock derivative of gospel and early polyphonic hymns, is the crown jewel of the collection. That Clapton wrote it makes it all the more amazing. Even the lyrics express a rebirth.

"I have finally found a way to live.

Just like I never could before
I know that I don't have much to give

But I can open any door
Everybody knows the secret
Everybody knows the score
I have finally found a way to live
In the colour of the Lord."

Perhaps that idea and the philosophy of the other dazzler, "Well All Right," explain the intent of the name Blind Faith—

"Well all right so I've been foolish

Well all right let people know
'Bout the dreams and wishes
that you dream

In the night when lights are low
Well all right

Well all right

You know we'll live and love
with all our might...

You know our lifetime love
will be all right."

Baker's 15-minute song, "Do What You Like," is the only real remnant from Cream. It is lyrically and melodically weak and little more than an excuse to jam in five-four time. But Winwood's vocal pulls it out of monotony until they can step out and solo. Baker's solo is probably his best on record. In spite of its limitations, the song succeeds as a much needed rock excursion into five.

Frantic blues rock freaks will be disappointed, but this record has more soul than a four-hour-long live recording of "Dust My Broom." Or "Spoonful." Or "Crossroads." Or.

—Johanna Schier